

Homily: 06/01/2025 - Year C – The Ascension of the Lord

“If you love me, you would surely be glad that I am going to the Father, alleluia.”

Today’s readings describe the Ascension of the Lord Jesus into his Heavenly glory after promising his disciples the Holy Spirit as their source of Heavenly power and commanding them to bear witness to him throughout the world by their lives and preaching. But the ascended Jesus is still with us through his indwelling Holy Spirit as he has promised, *“I am with you always; to the end of time.”* Today’s feast is a celebration of Jesus’ final glorification after his suffering, death, and Resurrection – a glory in which we, too, hope to share.

Jesus's earthly life culminates with his Ascension, which we also profess in the Creed: “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.”

Today’s first reading (Acts 1:1-11) recounts the event of the Ascension as recorded in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. First, Jesus instructed his apostles to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5), so that they might become his “witnesses to the ends of the earth” by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then “a cloud took him from their sight”

(Acts 1:9), and two Heavenly messengers in white garments assured them of Jesus' return in glory.

When he comes to the Ascension, Luke reports the initial question of the Apostles about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, meaning the Kingdom of God, and Jesus' response: "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that The Father has established by His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7).

Luke also includes Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will come to them — "you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thus, Theophilus (and all of us) are assured that the teachings we receive from the successors of the Apostles come from the Holy Spirit Who, Jesus had told them (and us) before His death and Rising, "will not come unless I go."

In the second reading to the Ephesians (Eph 1:17-23), Paul explains the theological meaning of Jesus' exaltation by saying, "*May God enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we may know the great hope to which we have been called*" (Eph 1:18). Our great hope is that one day we too will ascend to Heavenly glory, provided we fulfill our part of the mission entrusted to us by our ascending Lord. Our mission is to preach the Good News of salvation to the whole world through word and deed. We

will continue to receive the divine assistance and the spiritual gifts necessary for our Christian witness through the gift of Jesus and the Father to us of the Holy Spirit living within us.

Now I would like to share a quick, funny story: it's about a new army recruit standing at attention on the drill field. The drill instructor yells, "Forward, march!" and the entire ranks begin to move, except for this one new recruit who remains at attention. The drill instructor turns to him and yells in his right ear, "Is this thing working?" "Sir, yes, sir!" the recruit yells back. The drill instructor then walks around to the other ear and yells, "Is this thing working?" "Sir, yes, sir!" the soldier replies. "Then why didn't you march when I gave the order?" "Sir, I didn't hear you call my name." Some of us are like that soldier, waiting for God to call our names. However, the great commission given by Jesus on the day of his Ascension is a blanket order that includes everyone's name. You can be sure that the Man in charge says, "Go! Make disciples! Teach!" It is your mission and my mission.

Today's Gospel describes how Jesus ascended to Heaven after giving his final blessing and missionary command to his disciples. The command was to "*proclaim the Good News to the whole creation,*" "*to be his witnesses,*" and "*to make disciples of all nations.*" (Mt 28:16-20, Mk 16:15-20, Lk 24:46-53, Acts 1:1-11).

My brothers and sisters! If there had not been many dwelling places in the house of God the Father, our Lord would have told us that He was going on ahead to prepare the dwelling places of the saints. However, He knew that many such dwelling places were already prepared and awaiting the arrival of those who love God.

Therefore, He did not give this reason for His departure; instead, He expressed His desire to open the way for our ascent to those heavenly places and to ensure a safe passage for us by smoothing the road that had previously been impassable.

For heaven was then completely inaccessible to us; no human foot had ever trodden that pure and holy country of the angels. It was Christ who first prepared the way for our ascent there. By offering himself to God the Father as the firstfruits of all who are dead and buried, he provided us a way to enter heaven and was himself the first human being the inhabitants of heaven ever saw.

And so our Lord Jesus Christ has opened for us a new and living way, as Paul says, *not by entering a sanctuary made with hands, but by entering heaven itself to appear before God on our behalf.*

For Christ did not ascend to make his own appearance before God the Father; He was, is, and ever will be in the Father and in the sight of Him from whom He receives His being, for He is His Father's unfailing joy. But now the *Word*, who has

never before been clothed in human nature, has ascended as a man to show himself in a strange and unfamiliar fashion.

And he has done this on our behalf and in our name, so that being like us, though with his power as the Son, and hearing the command, "Sit at my right hand," as a member of our race, he might convey to all of us the glory of being children of God. For since he became man, it is as one of us that he sits at the right hand of God the Father, even though he is above all creation and one in substance with the Father, having truly come forth from him as God from God and Light from Light.

Each Sunday, we profess through the Creed, "He ascended into Heaven." Christ's Ascension was the culmination of God's Divine plan for Christ Jesus, his return to his Father with "Mission Accomplished." Jesus' Ascension is the grand finale of all his words and works done for us and for our salvation. It is a culmination, but not the conclusion. One wonder is that, although Jesus is now with God in glory, he continues to remain with us, dwelling within us together with the Father and the Holy Spirit: "Lo, I am with you always."

We must remember that the Feast of the Ascension celebrates one aspect of the Resurrection: Jesus' exaltation. He did not wait 40 days to be glorified at God's right hand; that had already happened at his Resurrection. Similar to the 40 days

after Easter during which He appeared to many in Israel, this public Ascension into Heaven was given to us for our sake.

The 40 days allowed many to experience personally Jesus' Resurrection and his being alive in a glorified body as fact to be counted upon — reality, and the fulfillment of prophecy. The focus of this Feast is the Heavenly reign of Christ, and the Lord's being "*seated at God's right hand,*" meaning that He alone will be in control of the continuing plan of salvation through the Holy Spirit, unrestricted by time, space, or culture.

It is there, at the "right hand of God," that Jesus continues to intercede for all of us with the Father. Thus, the Paschal Mystery — Jesus' passion, death, Resurrection, Ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit — is a single, unbroken reality, which is to be understood by faith. By His Ascension, Jesus, the risen Christ, True God and True Man, is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in glory forever.

Lastly, it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ was conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During His life, Jesus demonstrated the power of God's Holy Spirit at work in His miracles. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead to become the Christ of glory. Now, because of His ascension back to the Father, Christ, along with His Father, sends us the Holy Spirit.

This underscores the necessity of Christ's ascension, His movement into that higher world, that universe that belongs to God. For without Christ's ascension, Pentecost would not have occurred.

S Augustine proclaimed these words on the Feast: *"Today our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; let our hearts ascend with him. Listen to the words of the Apostle: 'If you have risen with Christ, set your hearts on the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth.'*

My beloved, God is with us. He has always been with us, and He will always be with us. The Ascension is not His departure; rather, it signifies the beginning of a new way for Him to be present with us through His Holy Spirit.

Come, Holy Spirit, come!